

NEWS

Dialing for FSA Hog Relief

In an effort to reach out to struggling hog producers, employees from several USDA agencies created and staffed an "800" number for farmers to quickly acquire information on FSA's Small Hog Operation Payment (SHOP) and other USDA assistance available to them.

SHOP provided \$50 million in immediate help to farmers through direct cash payments during the short February 1 through February 12 signup period. FSA led the way in setting up the special toll-free hotline to reach producers, especially those who may have never worked with USDA before. The effort involved help from the Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the Agricultural Marketing Service.

Volunteers from FSA and the Foreign Agricultural Service staffed FSA's "Hog Hotline" from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. throughout the SHOP signup period. They fielded questions on application procedures and qualifications from several hundred hog farmers. Volunteer staffers also offered producers information about market price updates and various USDA programs, including the pseudorabies eradication program.

Feedback was positive; farmers said the "800" number was a convenient method of getting applications for SHOP and information about their local USDA office. Volunteer staffers thought the hotline offered a crucial opportunity for producers to get help quickly, as well as to voice their concerns and opinions. And, Administrator

Kelly was impressed with the novel "Hog Hotline" approach. "FSA employees really took the initiative to develop a creative way for getting the word out on SHOP," he said.

Why Hog Prices Dropped So Drastically

Pork producers today are suffering catastrophically low prices for their hogs. Recently, hog prices fell to 10 cents a pound, before rebounding to around 27 cents. Unfortunately, the average farmer has to get around 40 cents a pound to break even.

The low hog prices are not caused by low demand or oversupply in the supermarkets, as you might expect. To the contrary, prices consumers pay for hams, pork chops, and other pork products have stayed relatively static by comparison. Part of the problem is that today, because of widespread consolidation in the pork packing industry, there are fewer large companies buying hogs and tighter capacity constraints. The companies purchasing hogs are already processing as many hogs as they can. Hog farmers, many of whom expanded their production in recent years, simply have more hogs to sell than the packing companies can use. And because of the Asian financial crisis, the market overseas for American pork is not as strong as it has been in the recent past. The inevitable result is low prices.



The 800-number in action. Dow Bantley and Mike Sienkiewicz, both from FSA, take calls from producers about the Small Hog Operation Payment.

photo by Eric Parsons

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

FSA National Equal Employment Opportunity/Civil Rights Advisory Council

In last month's *FSA NEWS*, I introduced you to the new National FSA Advisory Council, an 18-member group that will work on our Agency's long-term plan of operation, customer service, and budget and personnel issues. I would now like to talk about another council I have established to further improve the way we do things at FSA — the FSA National Equal Employment Opportunity/Civil Rights (EEO/CR) Advisory Council.

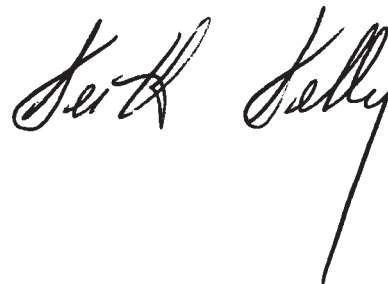
You should have all received a memo from me dated February 4, detailing my reasons for establishing the council and its functions and responsibilities. Briefly, I established the council to provide input and make recommendations to me on National issues to ensure equal and fair program

delivery, employment practices, and working conditions in FSA. All employees are eligible for nomination to the council, and the council will reflect a cross-section of the diversity in our Agency. I will select no more than 35 council members based on nominations from our various employee organizations and work areas (State Operations, Farm Loan Programs, Farm Programs, Commodity Operations, and Management). I will have this council up and running soon and look forward to their first report of recommendations. I will keep you advised of their progress and findings and how we are going to implement their changes.

I envision both the FSA National EEO/CR Advisory Council and the National

FSA Advisory Council as working jointly to improve Agency functions. The councils will make a broad sweep across Agency lines of responsibility, work experience, and backgrounds. The councils will provide a channel of communication for employees to advise me and help me to reach conclusions that will benefit all employees, our customers, and the Agency.

I ask you to support both of these councils. Positive changes take place with all of us involved in the process. I am confident that council members will work to serve all FSA customers and employees. We have the talent already at FSA. These councils will bring those talents out to improve customer service, working conditions, and employee morale.



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Editor: Jillene Johnson
Editorial Board: Janet Baker,
Star Bryant, Dann Stuart,
Steve Thompson.

Reporters: FSA employees.

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FSA Public Affairs Staff
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Stop 0506
Washington, DC 20250-0506

CORRECTION

February's *FSA NEWS* article, "The Farm Safety Net — Making It Stronger Than Ever," contained a couple of errors. The Small Hog Operation Payment (SHOP) provided small hog farmers approximately \$50 million in direct cash payments, not guaranteed operating loans. The \$1 billion that was mentioned is available through the guaranteed operating loan program, a program not traditionally taken advantage of by small hog producers. The February 1 through February 12 signup period was for the SHOP payment, not the guaranteed operating loan program.

FSA NEWS regrets the errors and any problems they may have caused.

Anonymous Farmer Donates Hay to Oklahoma Tribe

by Christine Zeigler, Communications Coordinator, FSA Missouri State Office

The most valuable gifts are given without expecting anything in return. So it is with a farmer in Christian County, Mo., who anonymously donated 17 tons of hay to a Native American tribe in Oklahoma.

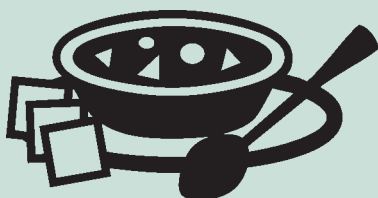
The generous farmer contacted FSA last fall, wishing to donate excess hay to drought-stricken farmers in Oklahoma and Texas. FSA employees in the Missouri State Office, Christian County Office, and Oklahoma State Office arranged for the farmer to donate the hay to the Choctaw Nation in Hugo, Okla.

All the planning came to fruition one day last November when Randy Bailey, Agricultural Director for the Choctaw Nation, picked up the 34 large bales of mixed hay and grass. He used a GSA truck and a borrowed trailer from a trailer sales lot in Hugo, Okla. Bailey drove 1,000 miles round-trip to pick up and deliver the hay to the tribe. Jerry Lawson, farm operator for the hay donor, supplied the tractor and hay loader.

FOOD FACT:

The English word “soup” comes from the Middle Ages word “sop,” which means a slice of bread over which roast drippings were poured. The first archaeological evidence of soup being consumed dates back to 6000 B.C., with the main ingredient being hippopotamus bones.

— Source: *The Food Files*



Farm operator Jerry Lawson (left) and Richard Reynolds, Christian County, Mo., CED.



Hay on the way to the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma.

Hiring Help Through the Workforce Recruitment Program

by Jim Kearney, Associate Administrator for Operations and Management

As the warmer months quickly approach, it is time to consider hiring summertime and permanent help through the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for College Students with Disabilities. WRP targets the hiring of college or university students and recent graduates with disabilities. FSA uses the program as a recruitment resource to fill both summer and permanent positions. Students work with FSA specialists on a broad range of tasks, such as writing, accounting, and clerical duties.

WRP is cosponsored by the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities and the Department of Defense (DoD). USDA is one of more than 15 Federal agencies that participate in WRP. DoD provides all assistive technology accommodations for the students, as well as some funding for interpreting services. To be eligible for this

program, students must have a targeted disability, be enrolled in a college or university and working toward a degree or certificate, and be interviewed by a WRP recruiter.

In 1998, WRP recruiters visited more than 180 colleges and universities, and the WRP database grew to more than 1,100 students and graduates. FSA alone made five WRP placements in headquarters, filling one permanent and four summer positions.

WRP, like all summer intern programs, gives students practical work experience to complement their education. Summer interns are exempt from ceiling restrictions, enhancing FSA's ability to provide students with the opportunity to explore possible careers in agriculture and with USDA. The program increases the diversity of our workforce and allows us to benefit from creative, fresh talent. Secretary Glickman advocates WRP and is

proud that last October USDA was honored as an "outstanding employer," with 27 hires across the country. The Department recognized the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) mission area as a top employer with seven hires nationwide, the second highest in USDA.

For 1999, FSA's WRP summer employment goal is nine, including five students in headquarters, three in state offices or St. Louis, Mo., and one in the Kansas City, Mo. complex. In addition to that, the Agency aims to fill two permanent positions in headquarters and one in the Kansas City complex.

If you are interested in hiring a WRP student for a summer or permanent position, contact LeAndrea Alsobrook, FFAS Disability Employment Program Manager, by March 19. She can be reached at (202) 418-8982 (voice) or (202) 418-9116 (TDD).



WILDLIFE FACT:

Farmers and ranchers provide food and habitat for 75 percent of our Nation's wildlife.

— Source: American Farm Bureau Federation

Homeless Win Big in Georgia State Office Contest

by Gloria James, Program Specialist; and Rhonda Sherrer, Program Technician; Georgia FSA State Office

What began as an innocent effort in the Georgia State Office to fight hunger developed into a good-spirited fight to the finish.

It all started with last October's USDA food drive campaign, "Making a Difference in One Month." USDA employees in Georgia took to heart Administrator Kelly's call for major field participation. Representatives from FSA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD) decided on the State Office's plan of action — to donate items to the Athens Area Homeless Shelter. When the National Agricultural Statistics Service/Georgia Agricultural Statistics Service learned of the campaign, they asked to join forces and help out.

The shelter submitted a wish list of basic necessities like toothbrushes, combs, bedsheets, and towels. Campaign coordinators distributed the list to State Office employees. Meanwhile, the coordinators organized another volunteer activity at Our Daily Bread, a local meal kitchen. They planned for

USDA employees to prepare and serve a noon meal there for approximately 130 people.

Thus the stage was set for one enterprising employee to suggest a challenge among the agencies. Whichever agency collected the least amount of items for the homeless shelter, she suggested, would have to hand over its director for dishwashing detail at the meal kitchen.

Naturally, the idea of doing that many dishes rallied the employees to a new level of commitment. No one wanted their director to have dishpan hands. So the race was on! For two weeks the agencies battled for supremacy. Staying in the lead was the name of the game. The agencies held regular reconnaissance missions — spying and snooping on the progress of their counterparts, then making daily reports to their directors.

The contest paid off big. USDA's collection for the homeless shelter far exceeded everyone's expectations, as the agencies made one of the largest single donations ever to the shelter.

Employees filled every item on the needs list, including 149 rolls of toilet paper, 57 rolls of paper towels, 35 bedsheets, 23 bottles of shampoo, 58 toothbrushes, and 208 razors. They also collected plenty of food, cleaning supplies, personal hygiene and health products, baby items, and children's toys. NRCS gratefully accepted a major donation from Fieldcrest Cannon Outlet in Commerce, Ga., including a huge assortment of sheets, pillowcases, and blankets — all new and still in their original packaging. In all, the agencies delivered two large vanloads of goods to the shelter, just in time for the Thanksgiving season.

So who ended up washing the dishes at the meal kitchen? Well, the coordinators decided that it was impossible to compare the value of a blanket to the value of a toothbrush to the value of a can of food. When it came down to the bottom line, they decided the agencies were all in this as one. So, they agreed the competition was a tie, and volunteers from all the participating agencies helped with the dishes.



Dishing up dessert and drinks are: (left to right) Betty King, FSA State Farm Loan Technician; Marilyn Sloan, RD; and Mary Weisenburg, Kitchen Coordinator, Our Daily Bread.



Georgia employees serving food include: (left to right) Hanson R. Carter, FSA SED and State FAC Chairperson; Laura Meadows, RD State Director; and John McEvoy, NRCS State Conservation Engineer.

Photos by Rhonda Sherrer

WHAT MAKES POPCORN POP?



Every kernel of popcorn is like a little steam engine — it has a certain amount of moisture inside, ideally 13 to 14 percent. When the kernel is heated, the moisture turns into steam. As the steam pressure builds it has no place to go, so an explosion occurs and you have popped corn!

— Source: Jolly Time Pop Corn

George Aldaya Receives Award for Hispanic Leadership

by Alicia Rodriguez, Executive Assistant to Secretary Glickman's Hispanic Advisory Council

The USDA/HACE (Hispanic American Cultural Effort), a USDA employee organization, presented George W. Aldaya, FSA's Deputy Administrator for Management, with a Certificate of Appreciation. He received the award for exemplary leadership of the Secretary's Hispanic Advisory Council in striving for solutions on Hispanic issues. Aldaya currently serves as co-chair of the council, along with Christine Pytel, NRCS, who also received an award.

Secretary Glickman established the Hispanic Advisory Council in 1997 to

give USDA management a focal point to assess, measure, and ensure progress in addressing Hispanic issues and objectives in program delivery and services, education, research, employment, and career development. The council consists of one member from each of the USDA mission areas, a senior advisor, and a representative from the USDA Hispanic Employees' Organization.

For more information on the Hispanic Advisory Council, you can visit their website at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/councils/hispanic>



Jose Osegueda, HACE's past President (right), presents George Aldaya with award.

photo by Ken Hammond

ESRA Goes Online

The USDA Employee Services and Recreation Association (ESRA) now has its own website. Besides offering a variety of programs and services, the website features a "USDA Bulletin Board" where employees can post events, meetings, conferences, etc., including official and unofficial Department functions. There is no charge to post to the site.

There is also a mail-order catalog on the site. Employees can order USDA logo items and other merchandise right from their computers. If you have any questions, call ESRA at (202) 720-ESRA or toll-free at (800) 626-ESRA.

The website address is: <http://www.recgov.org/usda/esra.html>



A Little About Bob

by Michael Kaufman, Public Affairs Specialist, Ohio FSA State Office

A few years ago, while attending a basketball game with my family, I received word that my ailing father had died. On the way home, my 10-year-old daughter and I stopped by the FSA office to let my coworkers know I would be on leave for a few days. While there, my daughter had the opportunity to meet Robert Cole, our Price Support Section Chief. Bob offered his sincere condolences and assured us he would inform the rest of the staff about my father's passing.

Several months later, I was recanting an event that occurred at work and mentioned Bob's name. My daughter recalled the name and asked if he was that "kind man who



Robert Cole

was sorry Grandpa died." She remembered Bob simply as a man who cared. To me, this positive recollection of Bob was a child's impression of a man respected throughout the Agency. Besides being a knowledgeable program expert, Bob is a pillar of integrity

and provides a sterling example for the rest of the Agency to follow. His passion for procedure and hard work is matched only by his caring consideration for his fellow man. FSA is fortunate indeed to have such a shining example of leadership, setting high standards for excellence.

It strikes me that from the mouths of babes comes an honest and accurate perception of a good man. It is important to note the impact first impressions make. Bob is a good example of the caring image our Agency strives to portray and needs to perpetuate. His manner and attitude are exemplary and should serve as a goal for the rest of us to emulate. Bob Cole is a humanitarian and role model for public service.

Outreach Training — Building New Partnerships

by Cliff Herron, Outreach Programs Manager, Outreach Programs Staff

The Outreach Programs Staff recently held training in Atlanta, Ga. and St. Paul, Minn. for State Executive Directors (SED) and State Outreach Coordinators (SOC) from all states and Puerto Rico. Outreach Staff Director Lou Anne Kling coordinated and facilitated the training, concentrating it on USDA's Civil Rights Action Team recommendations and reports from the National Commission on Small Farms.

The training covered techniques — such as holding community outreach meetings — for building partnerships with culturally diverse groups having varied farming methods. Participants learned ways to conduct successful outreach in times of lesser human and financial resources. Facilitators

encouraged participants to share successful and unsuccessful work experiences and helped the SEDs and SOCs review their states' particular outreach plans for improvements.

Participants listened to unique views of small/minority farmers, farm advocates, and representatives from community-based organizations — those closest to underserved farmers. Attendees from such varied groups as the regional Federation of Southern Cooperatives, the Inter-Tribal Indian Farm Advocacy Organization, and the locally-oriented African Refugee Organization spoke and interacted with training participants. Information shared by peers proved invaluable, as reflected in participants' training evaluations.

While the National Office organized the training, Lou Anne Kling gave the SEDs and SOCs credit for the training's scope and the general success of FSA's outreach program. "I commend the SEDs and SOCs for carrying out such an effective program, tailored to local customers, yet inclusive of state and National objectives," she said.

After the training, Outreach Staff personnel reported that recently submitted state outreach plans and quarterly reports showed a high level of creativity and enthusiasm. All the participants agreed that the training was extremely successful and asked for more, perhaps next time including our sister agencies.



Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road?

Albert Einstein — Whether the chicken crossed the road or the road crossed the chicken depends upon your frame of reference.

The Sphinx — You tell me.

Mark Twain — The news of its crossing has been greatly exaggerated.

Timothy Leary — Because that's the only kind of trip the Establishment would let it take.

Ernest Hemingway — To die. In the rain.

Groucho Marx — Chicken? What's all this talk about chicken? Why, I had an uncle who thought he was a chicken. My aunt almost divorced him, but we needed the eggs.

Why Did the Chicken Stop in the Middle of the Road?

Eric Parsons, FSA Public Affairs Branch Chief — To lay it on the line.

Answers to February's Puzzle

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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
Month of March		Women's History Month
March 4-5	Phoenix, Ariz.	Administrator Kelly to attend National Gleaning and Food Recovery Symposium
March 5-6	Bozeman, Mont.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, to attend NACS Zone A Meeting
March 5-6	Kalamazoo, Mich.	Jim Kearney, Associate Administrator, to attend the Minority Farmers Conference sponsored by the Michigan State Department of Agriculture
March 5-6	Springfield, Ill.	Larry Mitchell, Acting Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, to attend National Farmers Union Annual Convention
March 26-30	Burlingame, Calif.	Parks Shackelford, Associate Administrator, to attend North American Natural Resources Conference

Note: The above is subject to change.